

Diocesan Norms for Parish Pastoral Councils
Diocese of Covington, Kentucky
December 3, 2017

The Establishment of a Parish Pastoral Council

Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines for the Diocese of Covington were promulgated in 1985. These guidelines have not been updated or revised since that time. The Diocese of Covington Synod (2006) directed that each parish have a parish pastoral council (cf, Policy Admin 4). The Synod also directed that, “the Diocese will provide norms for the establishment and function of parish pastoral councils” (Policy Admin 4).

These guidelines replace the existing guidelines.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law states:

- “If the diocesan bishop judges it opportune after he has heard the presbyteral council, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish, over which the pastor presides and in which the Christian faithful, together with those who share in pastoral care by virtue of their office in the parish, assist in fostering pastoral activity” (c. 536 §1).
- “A pastoral council possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by the norms established by the diocesan bishop” (c. 536 §2).

NOTE: Using these guidelines, St. Joseph Parish supplements them by the text printed in italics to further outline the parish’s guidelines.

Purpose of a Parish Pastoral Council

The parish pastoral council is to advise the pastor on practical matters of parish life and act as a steward of the mission of the Gospel. The council, with and under the direction of the pastor, develops goals and prioritizes them based on the needs of the parish, the Gospel, and the teachings of the Church.

Role of the Pastor

The pastor convenes the council and directs the agenda. He serves as the leader of the spiritual and temporal goods of the parish and is responsible for creating an environment of open communication among council members.

Role of the Members

Members participate fully in the prayer and deliberation of the council. They are willing to participate in ongoing formation. They advise and provide recommendations to the pastor regarding the pastoral needs of the parish, as well as general directions, priorities, goals and objectives, and short and long-range plans.

Membership Qualifications

A fully initiated (has received the Sacraments of Baptism, Holy Eucharist, and Confirmation) Catholic sixteen (16) years or older who is an active, registered member of the parish and who participates in the sacramental life of the Church.

Members of the council are appointed by the pastor. Qualified candidates can self-nominate or be suggested by present council members, pastoral staff, or by the parish at large.

The council must have at least two (2) ex officio members: the deanery pastoral council representative from the parish, and one member of the parish finance council chosen by the pastor. Assigned parochial vicars and assigned permanent deacons are considered administration.

Term of Office

The term of office for all appointed members is three years, with possibility of reappointment. Members may serve only two consecutive terms. A member who serves two (2) consecutive terms may serve another three (3) year term one year after the conclusion of the original second term.

Only one third of the council seats are to be open for reappointment at the same time.

Council Membership

The pastor determines the number of council members that will best suit the needs of the parish. There shall be no fewer than six (6) and no more than twelve (12) members of the council including any and all ex officio members. ¹

St. Joseph Parish will use nine (8) members to serve on the council. Six (6) members will be selected. Two (2) members will be ex-officio: one (1) DPC representative and one (1) Finance Council member.

Council Meetings

Only the pastor can call a meeting of the council. In the absence of the pastor the council cannot meet. If the pastor of the parish dies, resigns, or is transferred, the council is suspended until a new pastor or parochial administrator ² has been appointed and reconvenes the council.

¹ Members of the parish administration are not included in the six (6) to twelve (12) membership limit.
² "A parochial administrator is a priest designated by the diocesan bishop to take the place of the pastor (c. 539). A parochial administrator has the same duties and rights as a pastor, unless determined otherwise by the diocesan bishop (c. 540 §1)."

Meetings should take place at least quarterly.

St. Joseph's council will meet quarterly time a year. It is suggested that these meetings occur in August, October, February and May.

The pastor of the parish presides over the council.

The members may elect a chairperson and a secretary each year.

The chairperson may assist the pastor in the preparation of the agenda. At the pastor's discretion, the chairperson may moderate the council meeting.

The pastor will prepare the agenda and distribute it and other materials to the council members.

The secretary records the minutes of the meeting.

The pastor is to review the parish pastoral council guidelines with the members of the council annually.

Recommendations made by the council to the pastor should involve consensus. Consensus is a process of deliberation that requires open dialogue, listening, prayer, and discernment. The pastor will consider the advice and recommendations of the council in his decision making. Whatever form this takes, the pastor always retains the responsibility for the final decision. *A more detailed description of consensus can be found at the end of this document.*

Committees

Depending on the size of the parish, members of committees may work with the parish pastoral council. All committees are accountable to the pastor.

A more detailed description of committees can be found at the end of this document.

Relationship to Finance Council

The parish finance council is mandated by canon law. Canon 537 states, "Each parish is to have a finance council which is regulated by universal law as well as by norms issued by the diocesan bishop; in this council the Christian faithful, selected according to the same norms, aid the pastor in the administration of the parish goods with due regard for the prescription of Canon 532."

The parish finance council is to provide counsel to the pastor concerning the administration of the parish finances and the budget.

While open communication between the parish pastoral council and the finance council is essential to ensure that the envisioned parish direction and priorities can be supported within the financial limits of the parish, any confusion between the roles belonging to each council is to be avoided.

Consensus

Participating in the council's decision-making process through consensus, calls for a definite procedure for council members.

- a) An investigation of all facets of the issue should be undertaken individually or by a committee.*
- b) With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, every effort should be made to achieve a deep understanding of the issue, using whatever talents and expertise are available within the council.*
- c) Full participation by council members – open forum discussions of the issue should then take place; each member should be invited to express reasons why he or she takes a given position.*
- d) The collective opinion, or consensus, should then be called for and provided.*
- e) When council members work with the consensus model, they must provide concrete reasons why they agree or disagree with a proposed action.*

Section 1 - role of the individual council member

- a) Analyze his/her own position as thoroughly as possible before the meeting, realizing that the task is incomplete until the missing pieces are supplied by other members of the council. Each person has a part of the truth. To accomplish this well, one should have the agenda and proposal under study several days prior to the meeting.*
- b) Recognize an obligation to express his/her own opinion and explain it fully so that other members will have the benefit of all members' thinking.*
- c) Recognize an obligation to listen to the opinions and feelings of other members and to be ready to modify his/her position on the basis of logic, understanding and sensitivity.*
- d) Avoid conflict-reducing techniques such as voting, compromising or giving in to keep the peace, realizing that differences of opinion are both acceptable and helpful. By exploring differences, the best course of action will gradually become apparent. Consensus begins only when members are listening and open to all possibilities.*

Section 2 - results of consensus

Consensus incorporates the realization that:

- a) The decision is being made in the most acceptable under the circumstances.*
- b) The decision represents areas of agreement rather than disagreement.*
- c) No one side of faction has been "defeated."*
- d) The welfare of the entire parish has been considered; and*
- e) Each member of the group can consequently live with the final recommendation.*

Section 3 - benefits of consensus

Resolving issues by consensus means that:

- a) Emphasis has been placed on people and consideration has been given to their growth of faith.*
- b) Everyone has had an opportunity for input.*
- c) The resulting conclusions should be beneficial in some degree to all members.*
- d) Everyone affected should be comfortable with the conclusion.*

Section 4 - obstacles to consensus

- a) Rigidity in one's opinions. Strong opinions and closed mindedness make consensus nearly impossible.*
- b) Aggressiveness. A hostile suspicious attitude toward contrary opinions and a determination to "win" the discussion eradicates the possibility of consensus.*
- c) Smothering, interrupting or over-talking others and expressing impatience with the dialogue can serve to cut short the process of consensus. Such behavior may indicate a lack of openness to change or masks a fear of conflict.*

Section 5 - how consensus is different than compromise

- a) Compromise is achieved by "mutual concessions" each person settles for something less than what is desired. Consensus is "general agreement" and since each person's position is respected and fully heard, the emotional climate is far better.*
- b) There is also a relational difference between consensus and compromise. The process of consensus tends to create closer relationships in a group, building group solidarity. Persons usually favor consensus over compromise because individuals and their gifts are recognized, creativity is encouraged and there are no losers.*

The council's use of consensus model is most authentic when used in the context of prayerful discernment and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Committees

Section 1 – formation of additional committees

At any time, additional committees may be formed if necessity requires them, be they temporary or become a standing committee. New committees should have a clear understanding of how it relates to the council and other committees.

Section 2 - Standing Committees

The Standing Committees shall be the following, none having precedence over the other:

a) Building & Property Maintenance

This committee shall see to the repair, upkeep and maintenance of all parish properties. It will be responsible for the self-inspection report which is sent to the insurance company.

b) Cemetery

This committee shall plan, coordinate and assist in the development of cemetery property. It will advise the pastor on issues that arise. It will also assist in making the cemetery's needs known to the public.

The Cemetery Manager (a volunteer position) may or may not be involved with the work of the committee. The Manager reports to the pastor.

c) Fundraising Committees: Lenten Fish Fries, Oktoberfish, Summer Festival.

d) Worship Committee

This committee shall plan, coordinate and assist with church environment, and other liturgical matters.

Section 3 – Cooperation

Each of the Standing Committees will cooperate/collaborate with any of the other committees. It will submit a regular oral report to the council through the liaison council member.

Other Advisory Councils of the Parish

The finance council plans for and monitors the financial health of St. Joseph Parish. Members recognize that sources of income translate into financing the ministry of the parish. They offer counsel and guidance to the pastor on those issues which affect the financial well-being of the parish.

These Parish Pastoral Council guidelines were adopted on May 5, 2018.